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March 2008 E-Newsletter

FIGHTING DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

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After balancing the mid-year budget and reducing the coming fiscal year's deficit from \$14.7 billion to \$7.4 billion, the Legislature is focusing on the remaining shortfall. Cutting programs or -- to a lesser extent -- finding new ways of raising revenue are the usual approaches that Sacramento takes to balancing the budget.

But we can't lose sight of a third option - eradicating perennial problems by actually attacking the roots of those problems. That's why I've proposed bills that are aimed at solving California's costly alcohol and drug abuse addictions through prevention and treatment. Our current policy of dealing with addiction has no end game and it's costing us lives and taxpayer dollars.

About a fifth of California's 170,000 inmates are doing time because of drug-related offenses. Drugs also played a role in the crimes that were committed by more than half of all inmates. As a result, prison spending has increased 74 percent in the last four years.

According to state Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, abuse of booze and drugs cost California \$44 billion in health care, prevention and treatment, criminal justice, lost productivity, and losses associated with crime. In 2005, Californians represented 40 percent of all publicly funded treatment admissions nationwide for methamphetamine addiction. Three years ago, more than 7,300 deaths were directly related to alcohol and drugs.

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Here is how I am tackling this deadly issue of addiction in this session. I am introducing bills to:

- Develop a comprehensive pre-natal screening and assessment program for expectant mothers to reduce the incidence of drug- or alcohol maladies among infants, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is one of the most common known causes of mental retardation yet it is entirely

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preventable. About 40,000 babies nationwide are born with some degree of alcohol-related damage, according to the March of Dimes., according to the March of Dimes. If my bill passes, the counties will have the option of participating in this screening and assessment program.

- Require all health insurers to cover the costs of treatment for substance and alcohol abuse - as well as mental health disorders - just as they would any physical illness. Medical research shows that addiction is a chronic disease of the brain and not solely a behavioral problem. Over the years, private insurers have quietly shifted the costs of treatment to taxpayers. In 1986, the insurers paid 29.6 percent of treatment costs nationwide compared with only 10 percent in 2003, according to a Boston University School of Public Health program, Join Together.
- Create a cabinet-level position - the Secretary of Addiction Prevention and Recovery Services - to oversee, coordinate, and bring more muscle to California's efforts to fight addiction.
- Force the alcohol industry to prominently display warnings on the labels of "alcopops" that they contain alcohol. These sugary, liquor-laced, flavored drinks contribute to our growing problem of under-age drinking, especially among teen-age girls. The labels on alcopops - as well as their taste -- mimic energy drinks, fruit juices, and sodas.

These bills are aimed at increasing prevention and also getting more addicts into treatment. The faster and more efficiently we can provide help and treatment, the more adults and children we can keep out of the courts, prisons, and foster care.

Getting help

If you or someone you know is battling an addiction problem, I encourage you to visit the Santa Clara County Department of Alcohol and Drug Services website -- <http://www.sccgov.org/portal/site/dads> -- or the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs website at <http://www.adp.ca.gov>.

HEALTH FAIR AND KIDS FUN DAY

On Saturday, April 5, join us at Miner Elementary School in South San Jose from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for our Health Fair and Kids Fun Day. The school is located on the 5600 block of Lean Avenue, just south of the Blossom Hill Road and Lean intersection.

The fair will be giving away bike helmets and produce while they last. There will be free health and dental screenings and free books for kids in pre-school and up to third grade. Parents

can sign up their children for medical coverage. Parents with children enrolled in health programs can attend workshops to understand how to navigate the systems.

Community partners participating in this event are the Central School's Children's Health Initiative and the Oak Grove School District. Other organizations also taking part include Second Harvest Food Bank, First 5, Kaiser Permanente, Healthy Silicon Valley, the Diabetes Society of Santa Clara Valley, Breathe America, the Lucille Packard Children's Hospital, and the Family Caregiver Alliance.

DON'T BECOME A VICTIM OF FRAUD

The city of San Jose's Office on Aging holds its first Fraud Awareness Day on Friday, March 7, inside the City Hall Council Chambers and the Rotunda, Fifth and Santa Clara Streets.

The 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. event is aimed at educating seniors on how to avoid different types of fraud, including predatory mortgage lending, home improvement scams, and foreclosure rescue scams. There will be speakers throughout the event and tables with resources will also be available. For more information, contact the Office of Aging (408) 979-7915.

"EGGSTRAVANGANZA" AND PARADE IN CAMPBELL

The Campbell Kiwanis Club is sponsoring an egg and candy hunt for kids, ages 2-12, on 10:30 a.m. Saturday, March 22, at the Campbell Community Center's athletic fields, 1 W. Campbell Ave.

Face painting, fingernail painting, and arts and crafts will be available for children at 9 a.m. The Kiwanis Club recommends parents and kids arrive on time for the hunt because the plastic-colored eggs filled with goodies go fast. Please remember to equip children with a basket or bag.

And on the same day, just a few blocks away, beginning at noon, the 11th Annual Bunnies and Bonnets Parade will march along Campbell Avenue from the east end of downtown to Third Street.

After the parade, a fair for children will be held on South First between Campbell Avenue and Orchard City Drive. The kids fair starts at 1 p.m. and ends at 3 p.m.

SENIOR WALK

The Third Annual West Valley Senior Walk is scheduled for Friday, April 4, at Westfield Valley Fair shopping mall, 2855 Stevens Creek Blvd. Registration begins at 8:45 a.m. The walk and a resource fair are scheduled from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Meet at the mall's Center Court. Organizers recommend participants use the entrance at Stevens Creek between the banks for Parking Structure A.